

An ~~non~~ <sup>non</sup> ~~prava~~  
inaugural Dissertation on  
Auricular Life  
For  
The degree of Doctor of Medicine  
in  
The University of Pennsylvania.

By John Purle of Pennsylvania

"It is for want of experience that men form very  
perfect ideas of matter, of its properties, of its combination,  
of its force, of its manner of action, of the energy which  
arises from its essence, and of course the whole universe  
comes to them but a world of illusions."

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Seneca

Of all the Phenomena of nature those of life  
are truly the most perplexingly astonishing, the most darkly  
mysterious - The mind in contemplating the fabric  
which it governs and directs, is confounded in the intricacy  
of its mechanism; and is forced to acknowledge, that  
human thought is indeed far too narrow to comprehend  
that wisdom and power which gave it existence -

Mysterious and wonderful as the frame of living  
man truly is, Philosophy has advanced not a little  
in the development of its nature -

Life, its cause and its essence, has been a theme  
of speculation to many, and the most renowned Physi-  
cians in all ages have had a belief that an accurate  
knowledge of life's Nature is the first and most  
fundamental principle in the science of Medicine.  
There is no doubt, that from confused and erroneous ideas  
on this subject many contradictory and absurd theories  
in Medicine have had their origin - There is indeed  
no science cultivated by man, which has so many  
opposing opinions and visionary theories blended with  
established truths, as the science of Medicine; and  
hence it has often been unjustly stigmatized, as a science  
intrinsically vague and conjectural -

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This seeming uncertainty of our science is not real; it is determinate and invariable in its principles; and tho' its fair and substantial fabric be veiled with the dress of speculation, we cannot therefore deny the elegance and firmness of its foundations —

Had medical Philosophers reasoned on the Phenomena of animate nature, by the sure guide of reasonable induction, many of the bewildering cobwebs of error and illusion, which sophistry and dreaming ingenuity have woven would in all probability never have existed in our science, to mislead the mind —

Cullen appears to have been the first, who thought correctly on the nature of life. "The Human body" said the Dr. is not an automaton or self-moving machine, but is kept alive and in motion by the constant action of stimuli upon it — But tho' Dr Cullen had this confined yet correct view of this truly sublime doctrine of the nature of life, yet he, perhaps not clearly seeing the elegance and truth of the idea abandoned it again for his favorite and more familiar Vis Medicatrix Nature — Thus abandoned and rejected by its father the embryo doctrine of the "forced state" of animal life was afterwards fostered and expanded by the great Drs Rush and Brown into a system of principles, at once regular, extensive, sublime and correct — a doctrine which must last while correct reasoning and sound principles in science, are admired —

Simple, and obviously consistent with true reason and Philosophy as the doctrine of the forced state of animal

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life is still by a strange infatuation for mysterious agents in the explication of mysterious phenomena the belief in the existence of a self-existing vital principle is cherished by men of the highest rank in our Profession -

At present therefore, the most prevalent opinions on this subject are 1<sup>st</sup> That the Phenomena of life depend upon the agency of a principle, which in its own nature is vital - and 2<sup>dly</sup> That life is the result of physical necessity; or in other words that the phenomena of life necessarily follow the action of stimuli upon peculiarly modified Matter, which in its own nature and independent of extrinsic causes is inanimate - which of all these opinions is true, some god may know, we content ourselves with enquiring which is the most probable -

The principle of animation, which has received various and, fanciful names, is supposed by those who believe in its reality, to be that power, by the energy of which dead matter is converted into living systems - and not being cognizable by the senses, as immaterial, in other words as spiritual -

But, indeed, there are many who believe in the agency of such a principle, who assert the independence of its existence; nay even the intelligence of its nature, who neither, will not, call it spirit, as if the name casts absurdity to the idea -

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Be its name what it may; we do not wish to combat words; but we refuse to believe in the terrene existence of any such being, which enjoys independent entity—

As we cannot see any difference between the characters ascribed to the Physician's vital principle, and the Metaphysician's spirit, we shall consider them hereafter as synonymous under the term of Spirit. And as the establishment of the soundness of a doctrine depends as much upon showing the invalidity and falsity of opposing opinions, as upon arguments for its own substantiation, a few pages upon the probability or improbability of the existence of Spirit can not be irrelevant.

Should it appear upon examination, that ~~that~~ these beings have, indeed, no real existence, that they are the mere dreams of fancy; should reason and common sense incline to rejecting that doctrine of animal life, which has for its basis, the existence of such a being, must be rejected as visionary and false— Spirit has long been the common solvent of all inexplicable phenomena; but in referring as to the agency, <sup>of the supposititious cause,</sup> for the appearances of things, the Men, have but pushed us farther into the depths of darkness, and have but rolled mountains in the room of pebbles— Great and many are the errors, which this doctrine has engendered in the world; the mind bereft astray by the illusive shimmer, (Spirit) prevented from turning its attention to matter, its laws, and its modifications, has filled the universe with phantoms for realities, dreams for causes—

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A very learned and beautiful writer remarks, that mankind will ever claim an acquaintance with the spiritual in proportion to their ignorance with the Material world; and indeed it may safely be affirmed, that until reason and philosophy shall have dispelled every cloud of dubious mystery from the face of nature, until the eternal & yet latent laws of matter are finally developed we may expect to see the world turn with the exploits of ghosts, specters and hole-goblins -

Spiritualists have indeed a "name" for their idol, but they give it neither "a local habitation" nor a "shape" - Spirit say they, is a being, simple, material, invisible, indestructible and unextended; that is a being possessing every negative property of real existence! -

Let us examine it according to this ~~affit~~ definition -

Dr. Darwin in the 1<sup>st</sup> vol. of Zoon: has given us a most satisfactory and conclusive argument, against the existence or agency of spirit upon Earth. If, says he, the "spirit of animation" was always unusually penetrable, it "could not influence or be influenced by the solidity of common Matter, they would exist together, but could not detinide each other from the part or space where they exist; that is they could not communicate motion to each other - No two things can influence or affect each other which have not some property <sup>common</sup> to them both; for to influence or affect another body is to give or to communicate some property to it that it had not before; but how can one body "give that to another which it does not possess itself?

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These words imply that they must agree in having  
the power or faculty of populating some common  
property - Thus if one body moves another from  
the part or space that it popes, it must have the  
power of occupying that space itself" This is  
surely a very conclusive argument against the agency  
of an immaterial principle on this earth; But Darwin  
who did not advance it as such, and who did not  
wish it to be considered so, obviated this, his own  
argument, by very pertinently giving his spirit the  
wonderful and almost omnipotent immateriality of  
assuming the property of solidity, or disowning the qualities  
of it, as occasion might require! - And thus he  
conceived a flat absurdity, because he wished to  
believe in spirit, yet was aware that a being void  
of every property of matter could not exert any influ-  
ence upon matter - This however is not the only  
instance in which Darwins imagination got the  
better of his reason; and we are forced, notwithstanding  
his application, to conclude from the alone, that Spirit  
possessing no property in common with matter, can have  
no existence "here below"; since there could be no use  
for beings in a place where they could neither influence  
or be influenced - Besides spirit, being an unextended  
entity, can have no contact with the material world, and  
of consequence cannot affect or be affected by it -

Philosophers under the firm persuasion that Matter is  
incapable of thought, have always referred us to the

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intellectual part of our nature, as a proof of the existence of an immaterial principle - True, we grant, that even man matter does never think, but were I asked to point <sup>out some</sup> thinking matter, I would point at a human being, who is indeed but a lump of feeling and thinking matter - But even granting the existence of spirit, which we have to be, invisible indissible and unextended, let us see whether it is possible that such an unembodied being could think - I presume there is no one who will not admit, that thought, in whatever part it may be performed, is always accompanied with motion of some kind in the substance or thing which does think - For unless ~~there~~ is proven, which I think ~~and~~ ~~that~~ ~~there~~ no one will undertake to do, that an effect may take place without motion, this must be granted - Many motion considered relatively to the body which moves, can be but of two kinds, viz the whole body either moves from its present situation, without any motion of its own particles; or the body remains fixed and its own particles move, a change situation - but it is evident that thought could not be the effect of any thing <sup>moving</sup> forwards in a direct line, without some internal Motion; and thought if it does proceed from the force of spirit must be the result of its own and internal Motion - But how can there be any motion of the parts of thing which is unextended? unless indeed we suppose an unextended being has parts

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The adoption of sentiments that reason cannot comprehend leads to eternal error, and is subversive of the mind's progress towards truth and knowledge —

Opinions are too often established, as it were, by inheritance, and defended, only because they were ~~the~~ sanctioned by our forefathers in science; and it seems as if men did not even dare to investigate for themselves, for fear reason should discover to them that their long cherished opinions are indeed but dreams — Much, however, may be expected from the spirit of free enquiry which appears at present to prevail in the Philosophic schools. The young enquirer into nature is <sup>happily</sup> permitted to examine for himself and to weigh in the balance of unbiased reason the opinions of ~~his~~ his forefathers; he is permitted to reject or to adopt whether his reason ratifies, or cancels, he is no longer bound down, particularly in this our blest country, to follow ~~servilely~~ <sup>servilely</sup> submissively the opinions of others or afraid by deviating from the orthodoxy of the <sup>schools</sup> schools, to incur their representatives' inquisitorial damnations of Asterodoxy —

Religion has even been enlisted into the Phalanx of immaterial disputants, and a quotation from St. Paul from Daniel, from Samuel &c: has in their opinion overthrown a volume of substantial reasoning — Thus truth ~~has~~ been clouded, and the simple and plausible arguments of reason and common sense have been swept into the kennels of inconsequence by the mystical dictums of superstition, prejudice & fanaticism —

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The disbelief in the existence of a being, of which we know nothing, many of which we can even form no idea, is looked upon by the generality of mankind as atheistical; but whatever the credulity of popularities may claim, are with the most heart-felt sincerity declare their belief in the immortality of the souls; for

1. Mortal matter braves the transient storm  
2. Man rises from the wreck unchanging but in form  
Darwin

Physicians, after having been driven to and fro, for ages on the an Ocean of mystical uncertainty and conjecture, were at last happily conducted to the port of truth, by the lights kindled by Drs Brown & Rush.

They first dared to reason in medicine, as Bacon did in Physics, and to consider the ghostly opinions of their predecessors and contemporaries in Medicine, as illusive phantoms, ~~fitted~~ fitted only to confound reason, bewilder the understanding and darken science with error and superstition —

According to the doctrine established by these two illustrious philosophers, "Man and other animals differ from themselves in their dead state, or from any other inanimate matter in this property alone; they can be affected by external agents, as well as by certain functions peculiar to themselves in such a manner that the

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phenomena peculiar to the living state can be produced — Thus then, according to this doctrine, life is a necessary result of the action of stimuli upon Matter, ~~Capacitated~~, by the modification of its substance, to take an living action —

But it may perhaps be said that this capacity of which we speak, is in reality nothing more or less than the vital principle of some Physicians; but it must be observed that a capacity, and a principle that has acts, are two very different things; the one is passive and the other active —

A pea has a capacity for life, but this is merely a quality which the ~~undifferent~~ matter of the pea has assumed in consequence of a peculiar modification, and which independent of stimuli will never <sup>cause</sup> the pea into a plant —

The experiments made by the celebrated Spalanzani on the ova of Frogs, afford us the most elegant proofs of the truth of this doctrine of animal life — He took a string of ova as the came from the female Frog, part of which he treated with diluted semen from a male Frog; and the other part he left untouched — The consequence of which was that that part of the string of ova which received the stimulus of the male semen produced tadpoles; while the other part which was not stimulated by its appropriate stimulus putrefied — In this case <sup>I would</sup> ask, ~~any one~~, but are these tadpoles forced into animal existence by the stimulus of the male semen? Did not Spalanzani presence living

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sat police as he pleased to apply or not apply a proper stimulus to force them into a living state. To be short, was their being not truly a "forced state" of being? —

There are many other facts which concinincly ~~of~~ prove the truth of the Brunonian doctrine of life; and among others the production of the chick in an egg is a familiar one. An egg may be kept a very long time in a common temperature without the production of a chick; but if this egg be ~~placed~~ <sup>subjected</sup> to ~~heat~~ <sup>heat</sup> and this, because the embryo chick has a capacity for life, yet for want of a proper stimulus to put that capacity into action, it ~~remains~~ <sup>remains</sup> a mere ~~capacitated~~ <sup>capacitated</sup> substance. If however this egg were placed into a temperature of a certain degree, the ~~capacitated~~ <sup>embryo</sup> ~~egg~~ would become a living chick. Here then we have the production of a living being, merely by the action of heat upon a body so organized as to possess a capacity for life. The heat acts ~~merely~~ <sup>merely</sup> as a stimulus. It has been said that if life were in a forced state of being, its duration could be prolonged to any extent. This however is no objection, or at least a very futile one. We consider that the same causes, which those who make this objection say, expels the vital principle from the body, is sufficient to destroy the vital capacity of the body.

If there is a vital principle an expansive power residing in the seeds of vegetables, why do they not

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hans or germinate? why do they remain in this same passive condition, so long as a proper stimulus is not applied to them? But granting the existence of an independent principle of life; must it have a stimulus to cause it into action? we see it must - and will it then still be said that life is not a "forced state" —

It has been asked by some; where does this capacity <sup>to</sup> life, this "excitability", of which we have been speaking, come from? — We see, that the various changes of combination, which the original elements of the world have assumed since the creation of time, has produced millions of contrary bodies, differing in their laws, their qualities, <sup>or</sup> properties — Chemistry assists us in this department of Philosophy; we are instructed by that science, that bodies so formed from the same elements of matter assume very different qualities &c —

Seeing this, is it irrational to suppose; may it not be the dictate of reason to assert, that the elements of matter may so arrange themselves, as to give to a body, the quality of being made <sup>active</sup> ~~or~~ <sup>of</sup> living, when acted upon, by congenial stimuli? —

If, say the opponents to this doctrine, it were true that the mere fortuitous concurrence ~~of the~~ of the elementary parts of matter could form an animated aggregate, why do we not see men and other animals springing up in the air under earth? — It is, however, not said, that any mechanical combination of matter does or can produce a truly

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but, from reasoning and from observation, we think  
it is more than probable that <sup>modification</sup> ~~may~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~does~~ produce  
such a change in common matter, as to give it  
a capacity of being made living, when acted upon  
by extensive and appropriate causes. —

This is truly a grand and comprehensive  
view of existence! Nothing can be more exalting  
minister of the goodness, the power, and the wisdom  
of the First Cause, than that view of nature which  
makes him the Cause of causes, giving laws to  
Matter, by which alone the various objects in  
the universal world, are produced. —

Simp's

